

# A Kellogg Foundation Publication

## Youth Philanthropy: A Framework of Best Practice

### Introduction

"The philosophy of youth as resources is simple. If youth know that their community needs them, they will realize that they can be partners in solving some of society's most vexing problems and perceive that their responsible action will improve the community's and their own situation." - *Changing Perspectives*, National Crime Prevention Council

Although everyone knows that youth are the leaders of tomorrow, too few people recognize that they can be - and in many cases, already are - the leaders of TODAY.

#### ***What can be done to better prepare young people for this leadership role?***

Youth philanthropy is an approach to empower and establish young people as community leaders. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has supported a number of programs which successfully demonstrate that experience in philanthropy encourages young people as community leaders.

The Foundation is interested in sharing the lessons learned from these youth philanthropy programs and encouraging efforts to develop new programs in other communities.

This "framework of best practice" in youth philanthropy is intended to serve as a decisionmaking guide for those interested in establishing similar efforts.

### Section 1 The BENEFITS of youth philanthropy programs

Giving the power of philanthropy to young people allows teenagers to become valuable contributors now, as well as essential leaders for the future.

Successful youth philanthropy programs can contribute to many positive outcomes (refer to Figures 1 and 2). The program responds to their need to belong and be a part of a peer group engaged in socially constructive activities. The experience gives them a basis for improved understanding of their importance to the community and encourages them to strive to achieve all they can in every walk of life.

By participating in a representative youth philanthropy board, they develop abilities to work with a wide range of people from different cultures and contexts, which is increasingly necessary as society becomes ever more diverse. Giving young people experience with the power of philanthropy also integrates issues of community participation into the program approach. It is human nature to build ownership and give higher importance to those things in which individuals have the power to decide.

Society has denied youth any useful or productive role until they are in their twenties. Many of our social problems are caused because youth feel marginalized, disenfranchised, and alienated. Institutions need to stop excluding youth and start to welcome the contributions they can make while they are youth.

In giving youth a **VOICE** and the power of choice, the youth philanthropy program is simply allowing and encouraging them to be committed, caring contributors to the community. Young people bring valuable new leadership skills and energies into the community, and, if allowed to apply their talents, encounter fewer limits to the growth and strength of the community. The additional creative and human resources are considerable.

#### **FIGURE 1: Benefits to Youth Participants**

- Feel needed and useful
- Assume new roles and responsibilities
- Learn the importance of giving back to their community
- Gain a sense of belonging
- Develop skills to work with a variety of people
  - To work across cultures
  - To see all sides of issues
  - To be more open-minded
  - To be honest and have integrity
- Increase community participation through volunteerism, career exploration, and democratic activity
- Advance social skills and improve community-youth relationships
- Build ownership and pride in the community
- Decrease negative behavior
- Gain leadership, organizational, and personal development skills
- Gain community development skills and learn fund development
- Enhance skills in conflict resolution, teambuilding, and communication
- Become role models for other youth
- Learn community assets and youth needs
- Gain credibility as valuable community resources
- Meet new people, network with adult leaders, and gain future contacts
- Gain knowledge of organizations and running boards
- Learn to work with and leverage limited resources
- Recognizing talents and abilities, increasing self-esteem
- Work as partners with adults as allies
- **HAVE FUN!**

#### **FIGURE 2: Benefits to Communities**

- Build awareness and understanding of youth problems and strategies for dealing with them
- Gain valuable new leadership skills and energies from young people
- Create a sense of community, encountering fewer limits to the growth and strength of the community

- Improve community-youth relationships
- Build awareness of youth potential and perspective
- Raise pride in the community
- Encounter fewer problems such as gang activity, alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, violence, and vandalism
- Develop skills to work with a variety of people
- Encourage committed, caring contributors
- Experience an increase in community participation
- Make an investment in the community, accomplishing important work
- Involve youth in planning and implementation, not just as recipients of services

As a result of successfully engaging young people and creating a sense of community, fewer problems are encountered, such as gang activity, alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, violence, and vandalism. Increasing self-esteem and, giving youth the **power to direct their future** in the community allows them to see their potential, increasing the positive expectations of themselves.

Also, giving young people the opportunity to contribute to community decisions allows them to recognize the impact every individual has upon building an effective community - now and in the future. All too often, young people do not feel they can make a difference, so they don't try. But, youth philanthropy demonstrates just how essential they can be to the community. The experience increases volunteerism and awareness of community needs, often triggering dedication to other arenas and issues. Once youth learn of their importance to the community, they are eager to get involved and share their views and expertise.

## Section 2: The PROGRAM of youth philanthropy

The youth philanthropy program approach includes elements of community development, youth development, leadership development, teambuilding, and multi-culturalism, among other things, which will help youth discover how diversity, leadership, and service can impact their future and the future of the communities in which they live.

"Youth philanthropy will connect youth with the community in ways that will increase their own self-esteem and level of competency while at the same time improving the quality of life of the community as a whole." --"Releasing Individual Capacities" Youth and Community Renewal

Youth philanthropy gives young people the power to make decisions, experience with a full range of leadership opportunities, advancement of social skills and improved community-youth relationships. In achieving this, youth and adults learn about and from each other, establish genuine relationships, and make an investment in the future of the community. Involving youth in philanthropy connects young people with the important local issues, increasing their self-esteem and building ownership and pride in the community. Through this experience, the young people participate in their own development while contributing to the development of the community.

"It will take the best in each of us to make the best world for all of us."

Margolein Bastin

"It's nice to know I can make a difference and I don't have to have a grand position or a great big title to do it." -- Carmela Barnes, Vice Chair Grand Rapids Foundation Youth Grant Committee

Youth philanthropy programs are most successful when integrated into a comprehensive approach to community development. Effective communities operate as a whole by getting everyone involved, including youth. Together, they work through issues, creating shared judgements and producing a sense of common purpose. Each element that makes up an effective community emphasizes the importance of getting young people involved, assuming new roles and responsibilities. Young people learn the importance of giving back to their communities and, as a result, gain credibility as valuable resources. By recognizing that youth are an important part of the "whole" of the community, community leaders can understand why it is essential to listen to young people and involve them in community decisionmaking. Youth must no longer be consigned to the edges of community life. *Every* person, including young people, has talents and capacities of value to others.

## Section 3: Grants

Youth Philanthropy programs usually make grants to support community development. It doesn't take a lot of money to make a difference. Young people can do a lot with little money.

Experience with youth philanthropy programs shows that young people tend to demonstrate their interests and commitments in three ways.

They tend to:

- Support efforts that address issues from across the community, not just those focused on youth.
- Invest in creative new approaches to solving problems.
- Go beyond funding support by giving their time.

## Section 4: The IMPACT of youth philanthropy programs

Youth philanthropy is a vehicle for creating positive leadership changes in communities, engaging young people as part of the strategy to enhance the quality of life. This involves training on issues of community assessment, diversity, leadership, conflict resolution, teambuilding and communication.

Youth philanthropy challenges young people to identify, address, and seek solutions to community needs through the application of a comprehensive grantmaking process as a strategy for nurturing a sense of social responsibility. As a result of their training and the grantmaking process, youth are well prepared to serve the community in other ways. They engage in volunteerism and stewardship.

When young people are trusted and valued as an important community resource, they rise to the occasion and serve with pride. This not only helps youth participating in the project but also creates role models for other youth, again helping the overall community.

"I probably wouldn't have thought of giving before, but I've seen \$5 and \$10 make a difference." --Jeanie Ringelberg, Youth Advisory Committee member, Grand Haven Area Community Foundation

"...We all have the potential to be philanthropists. This is not about money. It's about caring for humanity."--Linda Frank "Community," The Christian Science Monitor

## Section 5: The PROCESS of youth philanthropy programs

A youth philanthropy program involves a representative group of young people as a leadership component of a formal grantmaking process. The program is designed to serve identified needs of the community. The youth-run board engages in a full philanthropic process, from community needs assessment to fundraising and from grant awards to project evaluation.

**Though the process and procedures of each board may vary, the following is an example of a framework for initiating a youth philanthropy program. These are elements identified in successful youth philanthropy programs and should be locally modified.**

### A. Local Host

1. Community Funding Organizations: Community foundations and United Ways serve as host for most youth philanthropies.
2. Nonprofit Organizations: Groups like Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs often host a youth advisory group with philanthropic responsibilities.
3. Classrooms: Schools establish a leadership course designed around running a foundation and using philanthropy as a teaching tool.
4. Government: Cities may allocate funds for youth programs and establish a youth component to guide the spending.

## **B. Local Support**

One fundamental component to youth philanthropy is building local community support. This can be created through fund development with foundations, chambers of commerce, universities and community colleges, and state and national nonprofit organizations. Steps to be taken include sharing the framework of youth philanthropy with community members, connecting with the philanthropic community, building excitement, and establishing relationships for support and resources. Funds are needed for training youth, food and beverages for meetings, operating expenses, and grantmaking. The grantmaking fund can be offered as a challenge grant to the youth to engage them in fundraising. While youth have demonstrated that they can do a lot with few dollars, a minimum grantmaking budget of \$500 a year should be the goal. Grant support is necessary; however, community involvement may be more crucial.

## **C. Endowment**

The endowment involves corporate and private fundraising. Though youth philanthropy focuses on the allocation of funds, it also teaches the importance of raising money to sustain the program. The money is deposited into a youth endowment fund for future distribution of interest income. The endowment allows the program to become a permanent part of the fabric of the community.

## **D. Adult Involvement**

It is recommended that adult involvement be limited, allowing youth members to feel a sense of freedom to create without the potential imposition of adult ideas and influence. If the process is to work, youth must be completely in control of their own program. The adult roles throughout the program are to act as mentor and facilitator, assisting the members during the allocation of funds and in the development of volunteer and community service projects. It is crucial to have the adults oriented toward servant leadership, helping the young people realize their visions and work through the process, as opposed to having adults who are oriented toward finding fault, criticizing, and "doing for" youth.

## **E. Board Members**

It is essential to develop a diverse board of area young people. The board is selected through an application, interview and selection process. All groups within the community need to be included to truly ensure representation of local needs and interest. Successful boards include all levels of diversity (age, gender, race, religion, socio-economical, and geographical). Leadership ability is distributed across the youth population; dropouts have just as much potential to lead as do members of the National Honor Society. The differences among individual board members are one of the greatest strengths of the program. The number of participants in each board varies, with an average of approximately 20. Youth participants should range in age from 14 to 18 with attendance optional until the age of 21. This will allow for continuity as experienced members move on to other activities and encourages a continual infusion of new members each year. Once the youth board is formed, recruitment of replacements should be the youth's responsibility. Some youth boards have developed application forms. The initial board develops the operating procedures and appropriate documents.

## **F. Board Development**

The members participate in two board development retreats, at the beginning and end of each year. During the retreats the youth participate in numerous teambuilding activities, including relationship building, leadership training, and strategic planning. This is also the time when goals are set for the year and program plans are developed. In some cases, overnight retreats have proven valuable in allowing the opportunity for building in-depth relationships, which enhances cohesion of the board.

## **G. Organizational Process**

It is important for the board to establish organizational and programmatic goals. This includes developing a set schedule of board meeting dates and times, deciding how to run the meetings (through appointed officers or rotating leadership) and determining the best approach for decisionmaking. The program goals define the board's focus throughout the year. This involves developing a planning process such as work assignments, reporting procedures, grantmaking schedule, etc.

## **H. Use of Committees**

Though it is optional for the board to form subcommittees, they can be beneficial during the decisionmaking process, accomplishing goals and deciding meeting dates and times. Forming subcommittees (an help with time constraints, efficiency, and productivity).

## **I. Community Needs Assessment**

It is important for the youth board members to understand both the resources available and the needs of their community. The needs assessment is an approach for the board to research where the greatest needs are by identifying key community issues in broad categories such as education, health, disabilities, values, etc. The board forms (optional) subcommittees based on the identified community issues to address on-site visits to a variety of organizations within each category. The needs assessment challenges the young people to identify, address, and seek solutions to specific community problems. A number of youth philanthropy programs are teaching participants to do asset mapping in addition to conducting annual needs assessments. By having a better understanding of available resources, better needs assessment decisions may be made.

## **J. Program Evaluation**

Many important services are provided by thorough evaluation of programs and organizations. Improving the way programs deliver services, developing the management capacity of organizations, helping staff see problems more clearly, and discovering new avenues for growth are among the most critical internal uses for evaluation. In addition, evaluation provides the information needed to be accountable to the community being served and those providing support to the organization. A variety of evaluation methods may be used to gather and analyze information, including surveys, interviews, observations, focus groups, and so on.

## **K. Request for Proposal Process**

Youth boards often develop a request for proposals (RFP) that focuses on the priorities chosen as a result of the needs assessment. The RFP can be distributed to a wide group of nonprofits, or it can be mailed to targeted nonprofits. A common requirement of the RFP is that youth are involved in the development of the grant application addressing the need. In those cases where youth nonprofits are the targets, some youth boards have offered grant-writing workshops to the youth groups to help them better respond. In the spirit of proactive grantmaking, a number of youth boards have found that there are times when they must encourage and application or offer seed funds to try out an idea so that others will take it on.

## **L. Grantmaking Process**

The youth philanthropy program engages young people in the allocation of funds through the grantmaking process. The board develops an application for distribution to interested applicants. If decided by the board, the potential grantees are interviewed and assessed. The evaluation process may vary. However, boards generally decide, using the needs assessment data, by consensus rather than voting.

## **M. Community Service Projects**

The framework for best practice in youth philanthropy involves development of community awareness and volunteerism. It is important for the board to form basic guidelines for volunteering. The purpose of community service projects is to develop public relations, stay in touch with the community, make a difference to organizations that will not be funded, and is a key element of development and growth for committee members. The needs assessment focuses the board's approach in identifying organizations that could potentially benefit more from volunteer support than financial assistance. Organizations may apply only for volunteer assistance, if the option is available on the grant application. Youth grantmakers should also participate in community service projects to better understand the projects they are supporting and the needs being served. Methods of participation include: adopting one project for which the board will help raise funds, getting better acquainted with a project by serving as volunteers before considering funding, or volunteering for a project even though they are not able to provide funds.



"Acts of giving literally transform, empower, and improve us as individuals and as a society."--Dan Moore, Focus, W.K. Kellogg Foundation National Leadership Program

## **Section 6: The RESULTS of youth philanthropy programs**

A lot has been learned from existing youth philanthropy, programs such as Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP) and the Waterloo, Iowa, Teen Trust project.\* They demonstrate that youth philanthropy has substantial impacts on the participants and the communities. The objective of MCFYP is to build community foundation capacity, to establish youth as philanthropists, and to build permanent and growing funds within each community to meet local youth needs. The Teen Trust project coincides with these objectives, in addition to empowering teens with the authority to decide and direct their future. The experiences, based on the evaluations of MCFYP, proved very valuable. The participants felt they were making a difference, had learned more about the needs of the communities, had learned leadership skills, had reflected on their values, and had networked with other teen and adult community leaders in their community and around the state. The leadership development aspects of youth philanthropy programs are considerable as the growing number of alumni are moving into adult leadership roles in the community.

The effects on the community are immeasurable. Evaluations from the MCFYP and Teen Trust project found that young people learn how important it is to give back to their communities through a variety of services and by assuming positions as positive role models for other youth. The participants' activities in leadership and philanthropy do not end when they are no longer members of their youth philanthropy project. Alumni were questioned about a variety of topics relating to the effect the project had on them. The experience increased their volunteer services, influenced their focus, broadened their awareness and involvement in community needs and strengthened their desire for a particular career in a helping profession.

\*The Council of Michigan Foundations' Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project, One South Harbor Avenue, Suite 3, PO Box 599, Grand Haven, Michigan 49417

Black Hawk Leadership and the Community Foundation of Waterloo and Northeast Iowa's Teen Trust Project, 215 E. 4th Street, PO Box 1154, Waterloo, Iowa 50704

## **Section 7: Conclusion**

Thank you for your interest and sincere regard for the young people and for the community. If you would like additional information about youth philanthropy, please feel free to contact me.

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